

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01

A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 OC-06 CCO-00 TRSE-00 DHA-02

ACDA-07 /099 W

-----057012 051500Z /44

O 051530Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7961

INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRETORIA 3270

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: RH, PINS, PINT

SUBJECT: RHODESIAN INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES INTENSIFYING

1. SUMMARY: IT HAS BECOME EVIDENT IN RECENT WEEKS THAT IAN SMITH'S POLITICAL POSITION IS DETERIORATING, THOUGH HOW CRITICALLY IS UNCERTAIN. HIS REGIME FACES MOUNTING MILITARY PRESSURES AND COSTS, INCREASINGLY ACTIVE WHITE OPPOSITION, AND DECLINING WHITE MORALE. SMITH'S LEADERSHIP, ONCE LARGELY UNQUESTIONED BY WHITES EXCEPT FOR A SMALL LIBERAL FACTION, IS NOW BEING CHALLENGED FORCEFULLY BY BITTER-ENDERS ON HIS RIGHT. THE DEFECTION OF HIS RIGHT WING, WHICH HE ASSERTS HE WELCOMES, MAY IN FACT ALLOW SMITH GREATER FLEXIBILITY. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, RHODESIAN MILITARY LEADERS HAVE IMPLIED THAT THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE ARMY WOULD ASSUME A POLITICAL ROLE. WITHIN LIMITS SET BY ITSELF, THE ARMY MIGHT ACT TO SUPPORT SMITH; SHOULD THOSE LIMITS BE BREACHED, IT
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COULD CONCEIVABLY ACT AGAINST HIM. THE RHODESIAN SITUATION AS IT IS PRESENTLY DEVELOPING ARGUES FOR SMITH TO SEEK A SETTLEMENT SOON, BUT WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER SMITH READS IT THAT WAY. END SUMMARY.

2. DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE PAST MONTH HAVE INCREASED THE PRESSURES ON SALISBURY. THE COST OF THE WAR CONTINUES TO

ESCALATE AND THE CASUALTY RATE AMONG RHODESIAN FORCES HAS CLIMBED. IN EARLY JUNE, ECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STRAINS WERE INTENSIFIED BY EXTENSION OF THE LENGTH OF SERVICE FOR RHODESIAN WHITE MALES BETWEEN THE AGES OF 17 AND 38 TO MORE THAN SIX MONTHS PER YEAR. IN THE NEW BUDGET, DEFENSE EXPENDITURES INCREASED BY 44 PERCENT TO NEARLY R190 MILLION (\$219 MILLION). TOTAL WAR COSTS, INCLUDING COUNTER-INSURGENCY EXPENDITURES, WILL RUN APPROXIMATELY R265 MILLION (\$305 MILLION). MEANWHILE, PRESIDENT KAUNDA'S DECLARATION IN MAY OF A STATE OF WAR WITH RHODESIA, THE GATHERING OF NKOMO FORCES IN ZAMBIA, AND THE RECENT RISE IN INCIDENTS ALONG THE BORDER HAVE UNDERSCORED THE PROSPECT OF AN ESCALATION OF FIGHTING ON THE WESTERN FRONT.

3. AT THE SAME TIME, EXPANDING DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROBLEMS HAVE BESET SMITH. THE TWELVE RIGHT-WING RHODESIAN FRONT MP S WHO DEFECTED ON APRIL 29 HAVE CAUSED A NUMBER OF ANGRY CONFRONTATIONS IN PARLIAMENT AND HAVE NOW FORMED AN OPPOSITION PARTY, THE RHODESIAN ACTION PARTY. THE NEW PARTY'S PLATFORM REJECTS MOVES TOWARD MAJORITY RULE, BRITISH OR US INVOLVEMENT, AND ACCOMMODATION WITH MILITANT BLACK NATIONALISTS. IT SUPPORTS VIGOROUS EXECUTION OF THE ANTI-TERRORIST WAR AND A TURNHALLE-TYPE "SHARED-POWER" CONFEDERAL POLITICAL SOLUTION WITH PROTECTION OF "GROUP IDENTITIES".

4. FORMATION OF THE NEW PARTY WAS PRCEDED BY A BLISTERING
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ATTACK THIS PAST WEEKEND ON SMITH'S LEADERSHIP BY THE RF CHAIRMAN DES FROST, WHO THEREUPON RESIGNED FROM THE PARTY. FROST ACCUSED SMITH OF BEING A "TIRED AND NEGATIVE PRIME MINISTER". FROST'S STEPDOWN FOLLOWED BY TWO MONTHS THE RESIGNATION OF THE PARTY'S DEPUTY CHAIRMAN, HAROLD COLEMAN. IMPLYING THAT HE WAS NOT UNHAPPY WITH THE SELF-PURGING OF THE BITTER-ENDERS, SMITH SAID THERE WERE "AT LEAST A DOZEN MORE" RF MEMBERS UP TO THE RANK OF DIVISIONAL CHIARMAN WHO, IF THEY WERE HONEST, SHOULD ALSO LEAVE THE PARTY. A NUMBER OF LOCAL RF OFFICIALS HAVE IN FACT REPORTEDLY RESIGNED IN THE LAST FEW DAYS.

5. THE IMMEDIATE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THESE MOVES ARE UNCERTAIN. SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS ARTICLES FILED IN SALISBURY REPORT THAT SOME SOURCES BELIEVE SMITH MAY CALL A GENERAL ELECTION IN AUGUST OR EARLY SEPTEMBER. AT THE MINIMUM, ONE OR TWO BY-ELECTIONS ARE LIKELY IN THE NEAR FUTURE, AND THESE WILL PROVIDE SOME MEASURE OF RIGHT-WING STRENGTH. ALTHOUGH SMITH STILL RETAINS A MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT (38 OUT OF THE 66 SEATS, 50 OF THEM WHITE), HE CAN NO LONGER COUNT ON WHITES ALONE TO PROVIDE THE TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY NECESSARY FOR ANY CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, INCLUDING RATIFICATION OF A SETTLEMENT.

SMITH ALREADY WAS FORCED TO RELY ON THE VOTES OF SEVERAL OF
THE 16 BLACK MPS TO PASS THE CONTENTIOUS LAND TENURE ACT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PRETORIA 3270

6. PRESSURES ON THE GOVERNMENT FROM ANOTHER QUARTER WERE
ALSO MANIFESTED LAST WEEK. ARMY COMMANDER LT. GEN. HICKMAN
ON JUNE 24 INDICATED THAT THERE WAS A BOTTOM LINE IN ANY
NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT BELOW WHICH THE ARMY WOULD NOT GO.
EMPHASIZING THAT THE ARMY'S LOYALTY WAS TO THE NATION
AND NOT TO "THE RULING PARTY", HICKMAN DECLARED THAT UNDER
NO CONDITION WOULD THE ARMY ACCEPT DISBANDMENT. LT. GEN.
PETER WALLS, COMMANDER OF COMBINED OPERATIONS, OBLIQUELY
CRITICIZED THE PARLIAMENT IN A RECENT SPEECH, SAYING THAT,
WHILE THE COUNTRY WAS FIGHTING TO PRESERVE ITS STANDARDS,
HE HOPED THE PARLIAMENT WOULD PRODUCE THE QUALITY OF IDEAS
AND CONDUCT TO LEAD THE COUNTRY TO ITS ULTIMATE GOALS. THE
SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS INTERPRETED THIS AS A POSSIBLE THREAT
OF MILITARY INTERVENTION.

7. THE POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES IN SALISBURY REFLECT AND IN
TURN WILL PROBABLY FURTHER SPUR DECLINING MORALE AMONG WHITE
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RHODESIANS, A FACT OF LIFE OPENLY REFERRED TO BY GEN, HICKMAN A FEW DAYS AGO. THE GOVERNMENT RECENTLY REVEALED THAT EMIGRATION OUT OF THE COUNTRY WAS RUNNING AT A RECORD LEVEL (PRETORIA A-80). LAST WEEK'S ANNOUNCEMENT IN PARLIAMENT BY WICKUS DE KOCK, MP, FORMER CABINET MINISTER AND THIRD GENERATION RHODESIAN, THAT HE AND HIS FAMILY WERE LEAVING THE COUNTRY WAS A MAJOR PSYCHOLOGICAL BLOW TO WHITE RHODESIANS.

8. COMMENT: UNLESS THERE ARE MORE DEFECTIONS FROM THE RF, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT SMITH WOULD OPT FOR A GENERAL ELECTION AT THIS POINT. A BITTER CAMPAIGN COULD AGGRAVATE THE MALAISE. IF AND WHEN IT COMES TO RATIFICATION OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT, SMITH PRESUMABLY COULD RLY ON THE SUPPORT OF BLACK MPS. AS SEEN FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT, THE PROSPECTS OF FURTHER DEFECTIONS FROM THE RF TO THE NEW RIGHT-WING PARTY ARE UNCERTAIN. THE POSSIBLE SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE MILITARY'S POLITICAL ROLE IN THE COMING MONTHS ARE EVEN MORE A MATTER OF CONJECTURE. BY ASSERTING THE ARMY WOULD NOT ACCEPT DISBANDMENT, GEN. HICKMAN HAS IMPLIED THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE ARMY WOULD ASSUME A POLITICAL ROLE. WITHIN LIMITS SET BY ITSELF, THEREFORE, THE ARMY MIGHT ACT TO SUPPORT SMITH IF NECESSARY; SHOULD THOSE LIMITS BE BREACHED, IT COULD CONCEIVABLY ACT AGAINST HIM. POSSIBLY IN THE BELIEF HE WILL GAIN A FREER HAND, SMITH SAYS HE WELCOMES THE DEFECTION OF HIS RIGHT WING. HE COULD OF COURSE SIMPLY BE PUTTING ON A BRAVE FACE. WHATEVER SMITH THINKS OF HIS OWN SITUATION AND THAT OF THE COUNTRY, IT SHOULD BE EVIDENT TO HIM THAT A SIGNIFICANT DETERIORATION HAS SET IN. LOGICALLY, THIS WOULD LEAD ONE TO CONCLUDE THAT ACHIEVEMENT OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT AT AN EARLY DATE IS THEREFORE MORE DESIRABLE THAN EVER, BUT IN THE PAST SMITH HAS BEEN A MAN WHO DEFIES LOGIC.

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